



Yorkshire
Wildlife Trust



#TeamWilder Educators in Action

CASE STUDY: Burlington Junior School

Tell us about your school and the local area where you're based.

Burlington Junior School is one of eight primary schools in Bridlington, East Yorkshire. It has approximately 310 pupils from age 7 to 11 (Years 3 to 6). Approximately 50% of pupils are eligible for pupil premium; approximately 25% of pupils are on the SEN register. We are rated as a Good school by OFSTED (September 2021) and have a strong focus on the social, emotional and mental health of our pupils. Our school shares a site with two other schools: Burlington Infants and Burlington Pre-School – all three schools operate independently of each other. The site itself has had a pond, school garden and school field for many years, although parts have been under-utilised in the past.

When did your outdoor learning journey begin, and what prompted staff to make this a focus within the school?

We want our pupils to develop their connection with nature. Pupils have always spent time outside, although historically this was mostly for outdoor physical education; only occasionally would it involve other subject areas and even less often specifically with a focus on nature outdoors. A number of pupils in our school have a need for extra support in developing their social and emotional skills and improving their mental health. Their needs have been provided for through other programmes, but it was agreed by the school that outdoor



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education could enhance this further. Our pastoral lead’s passion for the outdoors led to her working with pupils outside; after which, she reported the benefits they gained from this through increased confidence, wellbeing, communication skills and social skills.

We also wanted to explore how we could better utilise our school grounds for social and emotional skills-building activities and improve the biodiversity within the grounds. We wanted pupils to take ownership of their immediate school environment, with the aim that this would embed an understanding of and respect for their local environment and beyond. Through our curriculum work and outdoor activities, we wanted pupils to understand that our local and global nature is in crisis, but that they could actively do something positive to help alleviate this crisis through simple actions and promoting understanding. The ideal is that this impact would also ripple out to parents and the wider community.

What sorts of things have you done for nature so far?

- Since summer 2020, we have tidied up our neglected pond area to enable pupils to access it once more and have regenerated the pond with oxygenating plants to clear the water – our efforts were rewarded by the frogs laying frog spawn for the first time in a number of years in spring 2023.





**Yorkshire
Wildlife Trust**



- Pupils have been planting pollinator-friendly flowers in and around our vegetable beds in a bid to attract more wildlife and increase our yields of fruit and vegetables; our increased Garden Club activity has allowed us to work towards achieving the RHS School Garden Awards.
- We have established an orchard within the school grounds, and our classwork on trees has enabled us to become a Beacon School for the Tree Council's Young Tree Champions.
- We have recently planted a hedgerow, using native species as opposed to the existing hedgerows within the school grounds. This will provide food and shelter for birds and insects in years to come.
- With support from Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, we have established a meadow area on a section of our school field; we allow this to grow through the year with paths for access and learning activities cut by our fab premises officer Mr Wollerton. At the end of each summer pupils and staff then work together to cut the meadow, rake off the arisings and scarify the area to increase the amount of wildflower seed finding its way into the soil.
- Over the last two years every pupil has had the chance to plant a tree seed. The aim is for each pupil to nurture their sapling and then take it home to plant or donate their tree for a community planting project.
- In November 2022 we planted a tree to mark the late Queen's Platinum Jubilee.
- Distinct 'Wildlife Areas' have been created and established around the school with their own focus on different habitats and linked curriculum and extra-curricular activities.
- We have made bird feeders and nest boxes and have been super excited to see many birds coming to feast on the fat balls and make homes in our nest boxes.



- We have made The Wildlife Trust's 30 Days Wild initiative a key part of our school calendar, and now each year pupils are challenged to undertake a 'wild' activity each day for the month – some of these are focused on building nature connection, while others involve taking positive action for nature, such as 'water the tree seedlings' or 'make a seed cake for the birds' - www.wildlifetrusts.org/30dayswild

What resources or support have you used?

We have connected with various organisations including Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, The Tree Council, The Royal Horticultural Society and local community groups and businesses to help us in our journey so far. Funding from Tesco allowed us to create our school pond. We have also:

- Participated in the Tree Council's 'Young Tree Champions' (YTC) initiative, becoming a Beacon School for the YTC in 2022. We are still working closely with the YTC to ensure we continue our status as a Beacon School this year. Four of our pupils have become ambassadors for the YTC.
- Worked towards the Royal Horticultural Society's School's Garden Awards, using the wealth of resources on their website, and became a RHS 5-Star Gardening School (its highest award) in 2023. We received a reward for this that will begin to help fund our future planting activities.
- Applied to the 'Copse in a Box' scheme for root trainers and books on how to plant tree seeds, which we have received and used to plant tree seeds as a whole school project.
- Received financial support from the Bridlington Lions.
- Staff from our school have written articles for the national magazine 'Primary Science' on outdoor maths, our nature journey and also on outdoor learning and mental health.



Yorkshire
Wildlife Trust



- Received fruit trees and hedge plants from the Tree Council, and the tree from the Queen's Green Canopy 'Tree of Trees' which was presented to the Tree Council, where they chose our school for the planting of their tree – a great honour.
- We had a sign made voluntarily and for free for our nature area of a nature-inspired poem written by the school, etched onto a long-lasting material.
- We have sourced recycled wood and materials, received donations of materials from the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, and received nature-focused teaching resources from various organisations, including Bulbs4Kids; Grow Your Own Potatoes, Morrisons and others.

Did you empower or involve others?

There are many aspects to our nature work – working with pupils, planning, construction and maintenance, administration, applications for funding and support, communication – and we are fortunate to have a team within our staff, including teachers, teaching assistants, our pastoral lead, our premises officer and our head-teacher, with a collective vision to promote and advance our nature activities.

In our actions, we have worked with other schools, notably nearby New Pasture Lane Primary, who have also been increasing their focus on nature and outdoor learning in recent years, and with whom we have developed a close relationship as we share learning and co-create joint initiatives that allow pupils to take part in exciting learning opportunities on each other's sites.

We have also involved the local community (including the Bridlington Lions, parents, the Brownies and Guides), invited the mayors in office and ensured the local press have presented our stories to the wider community.

Most importantly, our pupils have been involved in the conception, planning and implementation of all our nature-focused activities; we have established a Nature Council to help promote and coordinate our nature work within school and we strive to empower all our pupils to take ownership of the development of our outdoor spaces and our activity programme.

How did it make you feel?

It is incredibly rewarding to see both the changes to the school site and the reactions from pupils to the projects that they have helped to shape. Pupils really enjoy being outside – they are excited when they know it's their turn to go outside. There are so many instances of how being outside has helped with individual pupils' social, emotional and mental health, and also helped with behaviour and re-engagement with their school environment. The staff involved have an equal passion for being outside and seeing environmental education develop within our school – it has brought those staff working on these initiatives closer together as a team.

What changes have there been as a result of your actions?

Our whole school community is becoming more conscious about nature and the benefits of time spent outdoors. We also find links to enhance this: for example, in the recent Science Week UK 2023 event, our entire school studied keystone animal species in detail – the Year 6 chose bees. This led to a week's worth of activities on bees and our environment, with pupils becoming more aware of how nature interacts and how we as humans affect this, in both positive and negative ways.

Around our school grounds, we have planted orchards, trees, hedgerows, developed wildlife homes and habitats and are now monitoring these as they grow and develop, creating both present and future opportunities for outdoor learning and wildlife exploration. It is a delight to see and hear the increasing number of blackbirds, wrens, sparrows and finches that feed in our trees and take shelter in our hedgerows.

There is a definite increase in biodiversity in the meadow area – with support from Yorkshire Wildlife Trust we introduced additional grass and flower species specifically for this reason and this area is now a key focus of our bug hunts and informal species surveys.

As well as making a difference for wildlife and for pupils, our nature-focused work is also having a positive impact on our community relations and wider perceptions of our school; parents have come to help plant hedgerows and made visits after school to tour the site and see what their children have been doing for nature, we have had numerous visitors and lots of positive feedback from local and national organisations including Bridlington Lions, the Mayor of Bridlington, The Tree Council, The Speaker's Council and others, and our nature-focused work was even credited by OFSTED as being a key part of the way Burlington Juniors supports pupil mental health and encourages a positive attitude to learning – www.naturefriendlyschools.co.uk/results-nature-friendly-schools-project-recognised-schools-ofsted-report





What have been your favourite nature moments or encounters with wildlife whilst doing this?

It is the anecdotal stories which we enjoy the most: the excitement and wonder that a number of pupils have had by being outside and spotting the fauna and flora within their school grounds. We have pupils who struggle with their confidence or may not be high attainers in their lessons, but when outside show they can communicate effectively with others, can be a team leader, can take on a task and do it well and can put their energies into really making a positive impact outside.

The first step towards interacting with nature is to be aware of the environment around you: the way that pupils' faces light up when they hear and then see a robin; the very clear excitement pupils have seeing that frogs have spawned in our pond; the focus they will show when completing a natural art task outside or the energy they put into clearing and resowing the meadow area; the respect (and lack of fear) pupils now show to bumblebees – when one landed on the hand of one of our pupils recently and she let it stay there for some time instead of screaming in panic, this felt like a wonderful metaphor for our school's increasing nature connection; pupils' wonder of seeing seeds grow; just laying in the meadow area in the sun and watching the clouds drift by, allowing their imaginations to create stories from what they see.

What do you plan to do next?

We aim to continue to develop our curriculum so that outdoor learning and nature-focused activities are embedded within our teaching and learning. For this, we need to continue to develop the confidence of all adults within the school in taking pupils outside on a regular basis. This will involve providing the ideas and plans for the outdoor activities as well as the resources needed for these. We now have a subject focus for each half term for outdoor learning, where all classes are guided towards completing outdoor activities: in Spring 2 it's maths; in Summer 1 it's science; in Summer 2 it's art.



We will continue working with and using resources from the organisations we have connected with (e.g. the RHS Big Seed Sow; Wildlife Trust 30 Days Wild; RSPB Big School's Birdwatch) and aim to use these as further opportunities to connect with the community, and with parents in particular.

We use social media often to show others what we are doing and what we have done and will use this to further our connections. We want to maintain the contacts we have with other schools and expand on these across the Bridlington area. We will also work towards maintaining our status as a Beacon School for the Young Tree Champions each year and encourage other schools to become part of this scheme.

In order to build on the informal surveying we have been doing, we plan to start taking part in more 'official' citizen science surveys such as Yorkshire Wildlife Trust's Great Yorkshire Creature Count – www.ywt.org.uk/GYCC – both in order to create a better picture of whether or not our grounds are increasing in biodiversity as a result of the actions we are taking, and in order to help pupils see that they can connect to a bigger movement and make a useful contribution to national conservation efforts, all whilst having fun on the field! We are looking into apps such as iNaturalist – www.inaturalist.org – and the off-shoot, child-friendly app Seek – www.inaturalist.org/pages/seek_app – to support our efforts with this.

Thinking of the long term future for the whole Burlington site (of all three schools), we will work with the Tree Council to help enhance our site for our school community as a whole and for nature; for example, they will help us to devise and support a tree planting programme which will provide shade on our otherwise bare sunny field and create a nature trail around school for pupils to use for, hopefully, generations to come.

These are exciting times – there are so many ways that we could develop outdoor learning on our school site; these will develop as time, opportunities, ideas, and money become available.

What advice would you give to a member of staff at another school who wanted to develop the school's outdoor learning provision but didn't know where to start?

- Start simple – go with the type of activities that don't require a lot of resources at first.
- Encourage pupils to take out cameras to see what they can find. Do a scavenger hunt – watch (and photograph) how nature changes over time.
- Spotter's guides are great – challenging pupils to see what they can identify/spot in their local environment, then asking them to find out more about the plants and creatures they know and recognise (e.g. a nettle or a bumblebee) is a great learning activity. This is a good way to help pupils (and other staff members!) to realise how some of the plants and creatures we might take for granted, or even dislike, are crucial parts of our ecosystems!



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Wildlife Trust**



■ The Sensory Trust's Go Find It card game www.sensorytrust.org.uk/resources/activities/gofindit is a good way to build nature connection through a game, and it is interesting to ask pupils to keep a record of the different things that they find as the seasons change.

■ Encourage pupils to plant flower seeds which are likely to germinate and good for wildlife e.g. calendula or sunflowers – these can be put into the ground or in pots – and monitor who comes to visit.

Can you suggest any 'quick wins' for nature projects that are easy to resource, engaging for pupils and beneficial for nature?

■ Find an area to leave to go wild and encourage pupils to monitor, sketch, write about and photograph how it changes over time.

■ Tree planting is a good way to get whole-school involvement. Trees don't have to be spaced all around the school – a tightly packed hedgerow can be easier to manage and have more benefit for wildlife. The Woodland Trust provide free trees for schools and lots of accompanying advice and resources to make your planting day (and follow-on activities) a success www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant-trees/schools-and-communities

■ Build some nest boxes and bee homes and observe who takes up residence. If you sign up to become part of Yorkshire Wildlife Trust's #TeamWilder movement you can access loads of free toolkits for simple projects to engage pupils and make your site better for nature, including how-to guides for making and siting nest boxes – www.ywt.org.uk/team-wilder

If you're not so confident with woodworking it's worth contacting your local Men in Sheds group who may be able to provide some kits for pupils to make up.

Can you recommend any award schemes, websites, books, sources of support for schools that have helped you to embed nature into your teaching?

■ We feel that many areas of the curriculum lend themselves well to developing lessons with a nature focus and would encourage all schools to tap into the many free nature-focused teaching resources online from websites such as:

- www.creativestarlearning.co.uk
- www.outdoorclassroomday.org.uk/resources
- www.ltl.org.uk/free-resources
- www.buglife.org.uk/get-involved/children-and-schools/activities-for-schools
- www.treesforcities.org/our-work/schools-programme/tree-woodland-nature-resources/wild-teaching-toolkit
- www.wild-about-york-lesson-plans-and-resources



■ The RHS School Gardens scheme is great for supporting growing activities in school, with loads of great resources on the website www.schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/home

■ Use books such as *365 Days Wild* www.365dayswild.com and web resources such as Wildlife Watch www.wildlifewatch.org.uk/activities to find lots of simple starter activities that staff will find manageable and children will get excited about

■ Look into The Tree Council's Young Tree Champions scheme and consider becoming a beacon school for this, or at least using the free ideas and resources on their website www.treecouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/tree-champions

■ Take part in the 30 Days Wild Challenge and make use of the free resources www.wildlifetrusts.org/30-days-wild – it is great to have a motivation and goal for your work and this provides it in spades!

For more information on the amazing action for nature taking place at Burlington Juniors, check out:

📍 www.burlingtonnfnews.edublogs.org

📍 www.burlingtonjuniorschool.org/nature-friendly-schools

📍 [Twitter - @burlingtonjr](https://twitter.com/burlingtonjr)

📍 For direct enquiries Matt can be contacted via m.clark@bjs.eriding.net